Letter from Taizé

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Taizé
YOUNG ADULT EUROPEAN MEETING
Vienna
29 December '97 - 2 January '97/98

Vienna is expecting us

In a few weeks, the young adults' meeting in Vienna begins. For several months the Austrian capital has been getting ready to welcome tens of thousands of young people from Europe and the other continents, and we could say that the city is waiting for us. How could we describe the many aspects of this preparation?

THE PRAYER IN THE CATHEDRAL

Every day, at about midday, an unusual scene unfolds in the main nave of the cathedral: when the air is still reverberating with the last chord of the organ piece that ends the midday mass, a few young people come up to the steps of the altar, unroll a carpet, set up a few icons, and light dozens of small candles. A song begins: "Laudate omnes gentes" "Sing praises, all you peoples". This song expresses well the diversity of these young people from different countries and of others who are taken by surprise, having come into the cathedral perhaps as tourists.

With a few of the brothers of Taizé in the middle, the benches fill up with young people and adults who work in the area or who have come specially to the cathedral. Tourists from many countries remain standing, keep silence, wonder what to do, or sing uncertainly. Since the middle of September this prayer has been supporting the preparation of the meeting and it provides an axis of silence and praise.

A HIVE OF ACTIVITY

Since there are twenty or so people from Taizé crossing and re-crossing the city and region of Vienna – Brothers of the Community, Sisters of Saint Andrew, young people who give some months of their life – it is impossible to count the number of small meetings that are going on. From mid-September, thirteen launching meetings have brought together the representatives of one hundred and fifty parishes. Now, about four hundred parishes are being visited regularly, and these visits support the young people who are organizing the preparation of the European Meeting locally. Visits are made to youth groups, parish councils, parents' groups, Bible study groups and so on.

A big effort is also being made to inform and invite people who do not go to church, for example by participating in religious education classes with students of 15 to 18 years. In this way more and more people are being invited to help with the accommodation of young people. The memory of the last meeting at Vienna, five years ago, encourages families to have the confidence to open their doors once again.

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What are the priorities in Christian commitment?

The Christian communities are questioning themselves about their priorities at present. They feel it is very necessary to reinforce the dynamic of community in the parishes in order to support each other better and to be more welcoming. An important part of the very concrete commitments undertaken by some of the Christians in Vienna is the attention given to people excluded by society and the help given to refugees. Many of the young people who took part in the European Meeting five years ago remember the refugees from Bosnia who were being welcomed in almost all the parishes of the city.

Someone who helps the homeless describes her work:

"It is sometimes said that Vienna, whose people number just under two million but come from all sorts of origins, is the smallest of the international cities. It is the capital of one of the richest countries in Europe, and yet it harbours a lot of hidden poverty. For example, when you cross the city, you often see homeless people in the squares. The Church, and especially "Caritas", is trying to find responses to these situations. Caritas has a lot of parish centres which help those who live in their neighbourhoods, giving advice or material help. Welcoming and listening are essential, because a lot of people are victims of the anonymity of big city life and find themselves alone. In particular, people without a home are completely isolated, without family and without friends.

WELCOMING THE HOMELESS

During the last fifteen years, six welcome centres have been opened by Caritas, to welcome for example mothers with growing children, or young people, according to what is needed. Welcoming young people who live on the streets demands the most effort. It is more difficult to go towards them and to stay beside them. Young people want to try to get out of the situation by themselves, and help offered to them needs to be completely disinterested. There are also emergency shelters at night, near one of the city centre churches, as well as other homes, especially for old people and those who are sick.

The help given works better when the welcome centres are connected with a parish. The local community gives them support. And the people of a parish often have a better idea of what is going on in their neighbourhood, and they can let us know in time when someone is about to lose their home. On the other hand, there are more specialised centres which do work that a parish would not be able to do by itself.

Last winter the Catholic and Protestant parishes organized a rotating welcome for foreigners waiting for their papers. Every week, in turn, the parishes welcomed those in their neighbourhood who were no longer entitled to help from the state.

The contacts between a welcome centre and the parish are enriching. They make for support through prayer or when necessary through immediate practical help. Sometimes a small group of homeless people can join in the animation of the Sunday service and afterwards meet the young people of the parish during the coffee that follows the celebration. These informal meetings are important for creating a first contact and inspire initiatives which suit young people who don't really want to get roped into the organizations of older people.

VOLUNTARY HELP

In Vienna there are several projects in which young people are directly involved. For example there are three buses belonging to Caritas which go around the city with food or medical help. This would not be possible without the help of about sixty volunteers, most of whom are young. When we announced this project in a student newspaper, a dozen young people came forward to help. Thanks to all those who give a few hours every week, this service can keep going even during the summer.

The collaboration between volunteer and fulltime workers of Caritas is ver important. There is a great mutual trus and the presence of young volunteers i something irreplaceable.

For people with nowhere to live, i is essential to be able to find some where where they can feel "at home" and this is something that begins wit free and friendly talking together When trust begins to grow, they ca begin to understand that they too hav something important to say. It is not matter of giving in only one direction it is reciprocal. A second stage in wel coming a homeless person is in an in stitutional home, something which may enable them to find a real hom again later on. We receive valuabl help for this from the city, which own two hundred and fifty thousand flat and houses. In the different neigh bourhoods, the city makes flats avail able for those who are ready to begi to organize their life again.

PRAYER, SOURCE OF ENERGY

For several years, I have been realiz ing more and more that in order t welcome those without a roof ove their heads, we ourselves need to have a reliable place where we feel "a home". I have to accept myself if I am to accept others like myself! For ou little community, the source of energy is prayer. There are three of us, anc we run a shelter for the homeless. We have found that even those who have been the most excluded have a deep sense of prayer. And even those who have never set foot inside a church since their first communion ask us when we are coming out of the chape if we have prayed for them.

We also find that the Church is well accepted by those who are far away from it when they see the commitment of Christians for those excluded by society. Even if we do not talk about faith during our specifically social emergency work, in a way we are transmitting the faith. And we also see how this commitment to the very poor supports the life of the parish, both by material sharing, and by the sharing of time, attention, and prayer.

The question of legislation that concerns the poor is important, too. On two occasions we have had a "conference on poverty", organized with the different churches, all the political parties, and the organizations concerned. This has helped us to better understand the forms that poverty takes in Austria. Even if we are very rich compared to some countries, we cannot avoid seeing the growing gap between the rich and the poor. It is important that in these reflections and in concrete actions, the Church should be present.

A Prayer for the Season of Advent

For those who are preparing to go to the meeting in Vienna or for a family or small group that wishes to hold a prayer vigil before Christmas

SONG

PSALM

he heavens proclaim the glory of od, and the firmament shows forth e work of God's hands. Day unto ay takes up the story and night unto ight makes known the message.
lo speech, no word, no voice is heard, et their span extends through all the arth, their words to the utmost ounds of the world.
here God has placed a tent for the un; it comes forth like a bridegroom oming from his tent, rejoices like a hampion to run its course.
t the end of the sky is the rising of the un; to the furthest end of the sky is its ourse. There is nothing concealed om its burning heat.

from Psalm 19

READING

will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my hole being shall exult in my God; for e has clothed me with the garments f salvation, he has covered me with e robe of righteousness (...). For as e earth brings forth its shoots, and as garden causes what is sown in it to ring up, so the Lord God will cause ghteousness and praise to spring up efore all the nations.

Isaiah 61,10-11

or

n the sixth month the angel Gabriel as sent by God to a town in Galilee alled Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to man whose name was Joseph, of the ouse of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, Greetings, favored one! The Lord is ith you." But she was much perlexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Luke 1,26-38

SONG

SILENCE

PRAYER OF PRAISE

- We thank you, O God, for revealing your love in creation. We bless your holy name.
- For human beings made in your image and called to live in your communion, We bless your holy name.
- For the promise of your reign in justice and peace, in holiness and charity, We bless your holy name.
- For revealing your Kingdom in our midst through your Son Jesus Christ, We bless your holy name.
- For his humble birth and his holy life, for his words and his miracles, We bless your holy name.
- For his sufferings and death, for his resurrection and his entry into glory, We bless your holy name.
- For your Church called to be a place of communion for every human being, We bless your holy name.
- For the coming of your Kingdom within us by your Holy Spirit, We bless your holy name.
- For the coming of your Kingdom at the end of time, when you will be all in all, We bless your holy name.

OUR FATHER

PRAYER

God of all eternity, you know that our human language is almost incapable of expressing our longing for a communion with you. But you grant us the gift of a life hidden in you. And the sun rises on a new day, a day of trusting.

or

Christ Jesus, be our peace, you who tell us: Be not afraid, I am here.

SONGS

This prayer is taken from a book that will appear in English in 1998, containing forty-four prayers for the different liturgical seasons of the entire year. It was prepared by brothers of the Taizé Community as a help for those who pray either with others or alone.

Two Questions About Prayer

What can we know about Jesus' prayer?

Raised in a family of believers belonging to the people of Israel (Luke 2,39-52), Jesus observed like them the times of prayer. In a town like Nazareth, it was customary to pray three times a day, at the synagogue or at home. People prayed at the same time as the daily liturgies were being celebrated in the Temple of Jerusalem: the morning sacrifice, the afternoon sacrifice and the solemn closing of the gates in the evening. Three times a day, a similar prayer was said with, as a refrain, this acclamation: "Blessed be you, Lord!" In addition, in the morning and the evening, this prayer was preceded by the confession of faith which begins with the words "Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is one." Each person added personal intentions and prayers of intercession.

Since it went without saying that Jesus following his people's way of praying, the gospels do not speak about it. They mention instead his prayer outside the usual times and places. He went off to lonely places to pray by himself, sometimes for the entire night (Mark 1,35; Luke 6,12). He prayed at turning-points in his life and before making key decisions: at his baptism (Luke 3,21), before choosing the twelve apostles (Luke 6,12), when he is concerned to know what people, or at least his disciples, have discovered about him (Luke 9,18), before setting out on the road of his passion, where no turning back is possible (John 12,27-28; Luke 22,42-44). Twice we learn that he prayed for others: for Peter (Luke 22,32) and for all the disciples (John 17). The language for regular liturgical prayers was Hebrew. But when Jesus prayed outside the established custom, he did it in Aramaic, the language of everyday life, and called God "Abba," in other words "My Father!" (cf. Mark 14,36).

In the prayer of Jesus, the accent is placed on gratefulness and praise. When he realized one day that he had failed to touch the important and influential members of the people, he did not complain. He gave thanks to God in the joy of the Holy Spirit (Luke 10,21). Jesus knows that God always listens to him (John 11,42). Even when things happen in a different way than he could have wished, his only desire is for God to realize the project of his love (end of Luke 10,21; 22,42). Troubled by the approach of great suffering, Jesus considers asking God to deliver him from it. But then he prays, "Father, glorify your name" (John 12,27-28). With a small variation, this is the first petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Father, may your name be made holy" (Luke 11,2). Before us, Jesus prayed that God, his Father who is love, might be recognized in his holiness, glorified and praised.

What was the role of singing in the prayer of the first Christians?

In the beginning of the second century, a Roman governor found it necessary to take a greater interest in Christians. During the interrogations to which he submitted them, they told him among other things that "they were used to meeting together on a fixed day [Sunday] before sunrise and singing a hymn to Christ as to a god" (from a letter of Pliny the Younger to the Emperor Trajan). About eighty years after believers met for the first time in the name of the Risen Christ, singing had taken on such importance in Christian assemblies that one outside observer thought it necessary to mention it in his official report.

Going back to the beginnings, we find in the Acts of the Apostles an astonishing story where hymns play an important role (Acts 16,35-40). Paul and Silas were arrested. In their prison, "at about midnight, they were praying and singing hymns to God" (v.25). The other prisoners were listening to them, then the prison guard with his family and servants also took part in the gathering. The hymns of Paul and Silas had the strength to transform their stay in prison into a worship assembly with the proclamation of the Word of the Gospel (v.32) and a celebration of baptism (v.33)!

"Recite together psalms, hymns and spiritual songs that the Spirit inspires in you; sing and celebrate the Lord with all your heart" (Eph 5,19). In their gatherings Christians continued to sing the psalms which were at the heart of the Temple liturgy in Jerusalem. They also celebrated Christ by means of hymns, such as those found in Colossians 1 and Philippians 2. The "spiritual songs" may refer to the experience to which Paul was referring when he wrote, "If I speak in the tongues of men and angels" (1 Cor 13,1). This text does not deal with "speaking" as such; the same word is used in Eph 5,19 where it means "singing." The word is also found in the account of Pentecost where we hear the Christians "declare the wonders of God" in all the languages of the world (Acts 2,11). It is not a comprehensible proclamation of the Gospel, which Peter will begin afterwards (Acts 2,14-36), but a form of praise which liberates human beings from their shackles. Did not the spectators first think that the disciples were inebriated (Acts 2,15)? The singing inspired by the Holy Spirit breaks down barriers. It is part of the vast cosmic current of praise of all beings "in the heavens, on earth and beneath the earth" who confess and sing Christ the Lord (Phil 2,10; cf. Rev 5,13).

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

JANUARY

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

2 Tm 1:6-18

1 Thu Paul writes to Timothy: I remind you now to fan into flame the gift God has placed in you. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of inward strength, of love and of self-control.

Mt 7:24-27

2 Fri Jesus said: Whoever listens to my words and puts them into practice is like someone who built their house on rock.

Ne 8:8-12

3 Sat Do not be sad or afflicted: God's joy is your strength.

Mt 2:1-12

4 SUN When they saw the star, the wise men were filled with great joy. As they entered, they saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they knelt down and worshipped him.

Ps 119:33-40

5 Mon Turn my heart towards your way, O God, and not to selfish gain. By your word give me life.

Ep 3:2-6

6 Tue EPIPHANY

Paul writes: The mystery of Christ is that all peoples now share the same inheritance, being members of one body, and having received the same promise in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel.

1 Jn 4:7-12

7 Wed God's love for us has been shown in this way: God sent his only Son into the world that we might have life through him.

Ps 72

8 Thu In God's days justice will flourish, and peace in plenty until the end of time. For the Lord rescues the needy who call to him, and the poor who have no one to help.

Is 11:1-9

9 Fri Isaiah said: On that day there shall be no more hurt or violence, for the land will be filled with the knowledge of God as the water covers the bottom of the sea.

Ep 1:3-14

10 Sat God chose us in Christ, before the world was made, to be holy and faultless before him in love.

Lk 3:15-22

11 SUN John the Baptist said: I baptise you with water, but one stronger than I is coming and he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Jr 1:4-8

12 Mon God said to Jeremiah: Go to everyone I send you to. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to protect you.

Rm 5:1-11

13 Tue Our hope will not let us down, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

1 Jn 5:14-15

14 Wed John writes: We are confident that if we ask God for anything, and it is in accordance with his will, he will hear us.

Mk 10:17-22

15 Thu Jesus said to someone rich: You lack one thing. Go, sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.

Dt 6:4-9

16 Fri Moses said to the people: The Lord our God is the only God. Love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.

Rm 6:12-14

17 Sat Give yourselves to God and then sin will no longer have any power over you — you are not under law, but under grace.

1 Co 12:4-11

18 SUN In each person the Holy Spirit manifests its action for the good of all.

Jn 15:1-5

19 Mon Jesus said: Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

Ps 4

20 Tue Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. You have set me free from my distress.

1 Jn 4:7-11

21 Wed This is love: not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent his Son for the forgiveness of our sins.

Hos 14:2-9

22 Thu The Lord says: I will cure my people of their disloyalty, I shall love them with all my heart. I hear them and watch over them.

Ps 103

23 Fri Bless the Lord, my soul; let all that is in me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, my soul; forget none of his good deeds.

Lk 24:13-35

24 Sat Having recognised the Risen Christ, the disciples of Emmaus said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Lk 4:14-21

25 SUN Jesus read out these words of Isaiah the prophet: The Spirit of the Lord is on me. God has sent me to announce good news to the afflicted, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed.

Hab 2:1-4

26 Mon I shall stay awake, watching to see what God will say to me. And the Lord answered me and said, "The just will live by their faithfulness."

Jn 14:1-12

27 Tue Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

Mt 12:14-21

28 Wed Jesus fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah: My servant will not quarrel or cry out, he will not snuff out the smouldering wick. All the nations will put their hope in him.

1 P 4:7-11

29 Thu Peter writes: Above all, love each other deeply, because love wipes away many a sin.

Na 1:7-8

30 Fri God is better than a fortress in time of trouble. He recognizes those who trust in him, even when the flood rushes on.

Jn 6:57-63

31 Sat Jesus said: The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

JOHANNINE HOURS

LUKE 2, 8-20

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

Christmas, like every stage in the life of Jesus, needs to be seen in the light of Easter to let its full meaning appear. By the gift of his life even to the point of dying on the cross, Jesus sets humanity free from the fears that encumber us and opens the way to the life of full communion with God. And he will bring this about by means of a reversal we could never have suspected: by dying, by going into the most complete weakness.

At Christmas, the angel-messengers proclaim the glory of God. The sign given is a new-born child. But no more information is given about his destiny -- where, when or how? The whole promise and the presence of God unfold in a new-born child who represents the state of extreme dependance and vulnerability. God is not going to use other means to reveal himself and accomplish his plan. This is where his saving action is going to take place.

In this way he removes all ambiguity about his power and his authority. He does not force: he calls. As a new-born child, he asks for and stirs up what is best in human beings. God takes the risk that people are not going to refuse him. God is going to act through others, through the response of others.

In this way, he makes himself accessible for everyone. All humanity can recognize him, from the shepherds on the margins of society to the wise men from a foreign country who have neither scriptures nor prophets. What a hope is offered there! The messengers call us to peace, not to anxiety.

- Through which paths of weakness does God come into the world today?
- How does God come to be born in the things that are most vulnerable in my life?
- When am I able to say with the apostle Paul: "When I am weak, then I am strong"?

MEDITATING ON THE WORD
FEBRUARY

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

1 Co 13:1-13

1 SUN Even if I can understand all mysteries and know all things, even if I have the faith to move mountains, if I am without love I am nothing.

Lk 2:22-32

2 Mon PRESENTATION OF THE LORD When he saw the child Jesus, Simeon praised God, saying: My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples — a light to enlighten the nations.

Rm 8:26-27

3 Tue We do not know how to pray properly, but the Spirit comes to help us in our weakness and intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

Mt 21:28-31

4 Wed Jesus said: A father said to his two sons, "Go and work in the vineyard today." The first replied, "I will not," but afterwards thought better of it and went. The second replied, "Certainly, sir," but did not go. Which of the two did the father's will? Those listening said, "The first."

Ps 145

5 Thu All look to you in hope. And, with generous hand, you satisfy every living creature.

Mt 10:37-42

6 Fri Jesus said: If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, they will certainly not lose their reward.

Ps 40:7-12

7 Sat I said: Here I am, I have come, and as it is written, I desire to do your will, my God. Your law is deep within my heart.

Lk 5:1-11

8 SUN Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch." "Master," Simon replied, "we have worked hard all night long without catching anything, but because you say so I will let down the nets."

Is 45:3-7

9 Mon The Lord says: Though you did not know me, I have called you by your name.

Rm 12:3-8

10 Tue Just as each of us has one body with many parts, and the parts do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, who are many, form one body, and each of us belongs to all the others.

Mt 13:44-46

11 Wed Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like a trader looking for precious pearls, who on finding one of great value, goes, sells everything he has and buys it.

2 S 22:17-20

12 Thu The Lord rescued me from enemies who were stronger than I and set me in the open.

Heb 11:8-16

13 Fri By faith, Abraham answered God's call and set out for the land he was to inherit. And he set out without knowing where he was going.

Lk 24:13-35

14 Sat While two disciples were on their way to Emmaus, talking together about all that had happened, Jesus himself came up and walked with them.

Lk 6:17-23

15 SUN Jesus said: Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Mt 7:12

16 Mon Jesus said: Do to others as you would like them to do to you.

1 Co 10:12-13

17 Tue God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength. But when you are tempted, God will give you the means to stand up to it and will show you a way forward.

Jn 5:24-27

18 Wed Jesus said: Whoever listens to my words and believes in the one who sent me has passed from death to life.

Mt 14:22-33

19 Thu Jesus came towards his disciples, walking on the water, and they were terrified; but at once he said to them: Courage! It is I. Do not be afraid.

2 Tm 2:1-7

20 Fri Paul writes: Draw your strength from the grace which is in Christ Jesus.

Mt 6:19-21

21 Sat Jesus said: Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too.

Lk 6:27-35

22 SUN Jesus said: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

1 S 12:20-24

23 Mon Adore God alone; serve the Lord faithfully with all your heart, bear in mind the great things God has done.

1 Th 5:12-22

24 Tue See that people do not pay back evil for evil, but always seek what is good, both among yourselves and for others.

Mt 6:1-4

25 Wed ASH WEDNESDAY Jesus said: When you give, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your generosity is secret. And your Father, who sees all that is done in secret, will reward you.

Ps 51

26 Thu Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

2 Tm 1:6-11

27 Fri Paul writes to Timothy: Share in my sufferings for the Gospel, relying on the power of God who has saved us and called us to be holy.

Ph 2:1-11

28 Sat Paul writes: Be one in love, one in heart and one in mind; do nothing out of jealousy or vanity.

JOHANNINE HOURS

1 CORINTHIANS 2, 1–

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

Paul is the "Apostle to the Nations" the one who without exaggerating could claim to have done more than all the other apostles. His whole life puts into practice the command of the Risen Christ: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Mt. 28, 19.) At the same time he even confronted Peter and the elders of the Church in order to demand that nothing unnecessary should be imposed on people. He knows that God respects human freedom. Everyone is invited to stay "in the same condition in life as when Christ found them." No origin or situation in life should be despised. Only faith, only trust is necessary. And it is the same Paul who affirms: "I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words." Yes, for Paul faith can only be aroused by the action of the Spirit. Convincing speeches or extraordinary manifestations alone do not make a solid basis for faith.

Paul opens for us the way of mission as bearing witness. To bring the Gospel to someone can be nothing other than a bringing to birth into fulness of life. By a look of kindness, we can help an expectancy to open up in someone. By recognizing and bearing witness to the free gift of God, we can make a way for them to dare to give themselves. Mission also means recognizing with gratitude the action of the Holy Spirit who goes before us and who is present in every human being. When I discover what has been given to others, my life is enriched. When I bear witness to the thing for which I give my life, accepting that the essential is transmitted even through my poverty, a deep communion based on the essential grows up.

- Who are the people who have aroused and helped to develop in me a capacity to trust and to give myself?
- How can I discern the action of the Holy Spirit in those around me?

A Meaning to Life

In "Taizé: A Meaning to life"[1], Olivier ément, the Orthodox writer and Theo- ian who comes to Taizé regularly, gives vision of the Community's vocation and its ministry of welcoming young adults. re is an extract from the book:

Young people today are tired of talk; ey are thirsting for authenticity. It is use talking to them about commu- on if we cannot show them a place here communion is being worked out "come and see". At such a place ople are welcomed as they are with- t being judged; no-one is asked for eir doctrinal passport; but neverthe- s no secret is made of the fact that eryone is gathered around Christ, and at with him -- "I am the way", he said a way forward begins for those who ant it.

At Taizé, you can find a kind of hristianity that I like to call "post-ideo- gical". God, said one of the Church thers, is "always to be sought for", t at the same time he never stops ming towards us and giving himself. hat is to say, God is the Hidden One, e Secret and he is also Love; and so in e light of Christ we can come to see her people too as secret and as love. r monks, there is this possibility of liv- g out an unselfish love which opens nto the mystery of God and the mys- ry of the person, and it is probably this which attracts the young people most of all. They are in search of people who can be like an incarnation of meaning and with whom they can speak from the depths of themselves and about what preoccupies them. Their contact with the community allows them to discover an example and an inspiration rather than taboos and prohibitions. The meaning and the reasons for things are explained, and that changes everything. For there is no moralism at Taizé. Christianity is not moralism: it is energy, it is fire! As Pasternak wrote in one of his novels: it is the point at which life reaches "its highest degree of intensity".

At Taizé, one is completely liberated from the caricature of God as someone who causes fear, a God who condemns, a God who induces guilt. And so young people can discover the mystery of Christ and the mystery of the Holy Spirit as a power for life, for creation and for love which comes as a response to human distress and anguish. They can discover that this God who is "Love without limits" (in the words of "a monk of the Eastern Church") is not a distant sort of God, living in an overpowering eternity. No, he is a God who takes risks, a God who becomes incarnate, and in the end a God who is crucified. This God is not the author of evil; on the contrary, he is wounded by evil, crucified by evil. Yes, he is crucified without ceasing on the horrors of the world, yet ceaselessly rising from the dead and opening up unexpected ways of resurrection for us. He does not impose anything -- what kind of love could impose anything, or even impose itself? --, but acts like a wave of light and peace, or like a Life in which death changes its direction and gets wiped out as soon as the heart of a man or woman, with the "yes" of Mary, is freely opened to him. This is a God who is incarnate, crucified, and risen, and whose Spirit opens an infinite space for our newly released freedom, which becomes responsible and creative. This is also a God who deepens and enlarges our earthly joys, even the humblest ones, and makes them into something eternal: he is the one who changed the water of ordinariness into the wine of wild love at the wedding at Cana, who made the crowd sit down "on the green grass", so rare in Palestine, before sharing out food that would not run out, and who lit a fire of burning coals beside the lake to grill some fish and offer it to his friends. This is a God who is infinitely close to us, deeper within us than we are ourselves, so that however deep our despair may be, he is there, deeper still, standing between us and the void. This is a God who does not create hell -- that is something we can manage very well by ourselves! -- but who never stops descending into hell to release us. God stays at the door of every heart, even the hearts that remain closed before him, and, if necessary, he will wait for all eternity until they open to him.

At Taizé there is what one of the Fathers of the Church, Dionysius the Areopagite, calls "the beauty of communion". Young people find there a beauty that is calm, deep, and pacifying; they find it by means of songs that are both very beautiful and very simple, by means of icons, and by means of people's faces. For nothing is more beautiful than a face illuminated by an expression of trust and gentleness. And in beauty there is a mystery which is ultimately the mystery of God.

1. GIA Publications, 7404, S. Mason Avenue, Chicago, Ill. 60638

Echoes from the Continents

Croatia

Catholics and Orthodox together as pligrims in Taizé

Some young Christians who meet every Thursday to pray together in a Catholic parish in Zagreb were invited to contribute to an ecumenical prayer for peace. This prayer is held alternately in different churches in Zagreb. It has been taking place once a month for four years, and last April it was held in the Serbian Orthodox church at the time of Orthodox Easter. The young Catholics contributed to the preparation of the prayer and they took an active part in the celebration itself by singing several songs from Taizé. In the moving atmosphere of the celebration they were very warmly welcomed by everyone, something which gives rise to great hopes of future collaboration. A very large number of Serbs live in Zagreb but only about a thousand regularly attend the liturgy. Since they normally feel marginalized, the Orthodox were touched by the presence of young Catholics at their celebration of Easter.

The following month, at Pentecost, the ecumenical prayer for peace was organized in the monastery of the Carmelites. This time it was the Serbs who came to enrich the celebration with their beautiful songs. The young Catholics then decided to invite the Orthodox to join them and go to Taizé together.

So it came about that, on 17th August, a group of young Serbs from the Orthodox community at Zagreb and some of the surrounding towns shared a bus with a group of young Croats on the way to Taizé. The atmosphere quickly became

very friendly. They talked about their experiences and listened attentively, especially to the personal experiences of some of them during the war. Prejudices were overcome little by little by this dialogue, by good humour and above all by prayer and the spirit of reconciliation. The young Orthodox were particularly happy because they found new and open ways of thinking.

Faith in Jesus Christ really moves mountains of prejudice and intolerance. Communion, especially in prayer, opens the doors of mutual trust. It is a way for Christians to commit themselves for peace in the world and for the building of a better future. It was in this spirit that the young Catholics and Orthodox from Croatia came back from Taizé; and they intend to deepen their relationship and their commitment together. Now, they are in contact with other Christian communities in Zagreb in order to prepare to go to the European meeting in Vienna together.

Myanmar (Burma)

Community building

"If we could try to make a host of different reconciliations possible around us, in the most diverse situations..." Brother Roger's "Call to the younger Generations", in his letter for 1997, has met with many positive reactions in Asia. In many places, the young and less young have been reflecting prayerfully and some have started to make practical steps "that will allow us to enter the third millenium ready to live an adventure of reconciliation..." Here is an example of what has been happening in Myanmar:

"Community Building" was the theme chosen for a week long seminar in Taungyi, Myanmar. Nearly every parish of the diocese had responded to the invitation, yet is not easy to get away for a whole week when you work on the land; but the bishop had managed to make people understand his conviction that the local church has to be a true community.

A room had been prepared for prayer three times a day. All the people in this region of Myanmar belong to ethnic minorities. Most of them are Kayans, well known as fine musicians who were able to sing the songs in several voices right away. Once again, we were able to make the experience that we can create beauty with very little, a beauty that gradually brings an inner peace and, above all, trust.

Trust is a reality that is more than necessary here, especially the confidence to express ourselves in the presence of others. For all kinds of reasons that are part of the situation in this country, people have had to learn to keep everything to themselves. Through the various stages of the seminar, it was deeply moving to observe people starting to open up, and to see the faces becoming clearer. Although there was much laughter, at the same time people were uncovering something of the depth of their inner life in God. Using examples taken from everyday life, they were able to express how they lived, practically, day by day, in the footsteps of Christ. As the week progressed, the participants were able to see the close link between what they were discussing and what was happening in the prayer times. The songs, with their words almost entirely from the Bible, helped to make this link stronger.

On the Saturday, members of the Cathedral parish joined the young people for a day of retreat. Since the school exams had just ended, many more young people were free to come. The entire retreat was centered on forgiveness and reconciliation. A beautiful celebration open to everyone brought to a close both the seminar and the day of reteat. As they left for home, the groups from each parish went off with the practical commitment to build communion in their own parishes. Each group came forward to hand over a copy their commitments to the bishop who in turn gave each a copy of the Gospels as a sign of the mission they were receiving to bring about reconciliation in the places where they live.

PILGRIMAGE OF TRUST IN AUSTRALIA

Tasmania
Friday 16 January, 8 pm:
Reformed Church of Penguin.

Saturday 17 January 8 pm:
Church of the Apostles, Launceston.

Sunday 18 January, 10 am:
Pilgrim Uniting Church, Launceston.

Sunday 18 January, 7 pm:
All Saints' Anglican Church, South Hobart.

– Contact:
Tasmanian Council of Churches,
29 Bathurst Street, Hobart 7000.
phone and fax: 03. 6234.2543
e-mail : tcc@trump.net.au

South Australia
Meeting for Young Adults
Friday 23 — Monday 26 January
venue: Camp Coorong
ages: 17 — 35

– Contact:
Taizé Pilgrimage of Trust,
GPO Box 2534, Adelaide SA 5001.
Tel : 82025111; Fax: 82118041
e-mail : brianph@merlin.net.au

West Australia
Retreat for Young Adults
31 January — 1 February.

– Contact:
Amanda Short.
Anglican Youth Ministries,
Diocese of Perth,
42 Colin Street, PO Box 1790,
West Perth WA 6872.
Tel: 08 9321 3630; Fax: 08 9321 3626
e-mail : lumbar@iinet.net.au

A new 48 minutes video cassette to introduce others to the songs of Taizé.

Praying With the Songs of Taizé

This video shows why Christians all over th world have found the songs of Taizé helpf as a pathway into prayer. The history of the development and use at Taizé and elsewhere will be useful for all those who a trying to create a meditative prayer in the own church.

The video contains interviews with brothe of the Taizé Community, composer Fath Joseph Gélineau, young adults from seven countries and a family who use Taizé song to pray daily.

Brother Roger's words as well as long view of community prayers at Taizé take us to th heart of the mystery of prayer, for prayer not something that can be explained, arises when individuals open themselves God's love together, in an atmosphere simple trust.

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Letter from Taizé

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- In certain countries it is possible to pay **within the country**:

Australia: Airmail: $15 - c/o Francisca Ho, P.C Box 617, Epping, NSW 2121.
Canada: Airmail: $12 - Letter from Taizé c/ Karen Koester, #101, 10340-123 Street, Edmonto Alberta TN5 1N6.
Ireland: £5.50: Letter from Taizé, c/o 41 Dar mouth Square, Dublin 6.
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